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RUEHBFI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 3999

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USAID FOR ANE/SAA

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SUBJECT: MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR THE GLOBAL TIGER INITIATIVE

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SUMMARY

¶1. The World Bank-supported Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) significantly advanced diplomatic efforts to save the world's remaining endangered wild tigers at an April 10-12 workshop of the Association of Southeast Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) in Pattaya, Thailand. This workshop foreshadowed three upcoming meetings to promote 2010 as the Year of the Tiger. The workshop drafted a manifesto, referred to as the Pattaya Pledges, which calls on Asian governments to move promptly to share expertise to prevent illegal poaching and trafficking of wildlife.

A Forgotten Crisis

¶2. The April 10-12 workshop titled, "A Forgotten Crisis: Arresting Wildlife Depletion in Asia Through Strengthened Regional Cooperation and Effective Partnerships," attracted a large contingent of World Bank officials as well as government and NGO representatives from India, Nepal, China, and Southeast Asian states. The objective of the workshop was to build consensus on the nature of the "Forgotten Crisis" and how the world community should respond.

¶3. The presence of many representatives from India and Nepal highlighted the wildlife concerns of these tiger range states, which are also home to other iconic endangered species. The World Bank brought energy, strong personalities, and its convening power to bear at the workshop. Its efforts led to positive statements from senior Thai officials and an offer from Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to hold a ministerial-level conference in the autumn to advance the agenda of the World Bank's Year of the Tiger Summit, planned for 2010.

¶4. World Bank President Robert Zoellick, the ASEAN Director General, and Prime Minister Abhisit were scheduled to address the workshop. The cancellation of the ASEAN Summit, also being held in Pattaya, prevented their participation but did not disrupt the workshop. In a statement distributed at the workshop, World Bank President Zoellick noted the decline of tiger numbers over the last century

from 100,000 to 4,000 and asserted our moral obligation to preserve wildlife for future generations.

Pattaya Pledges

¶ 15. The workshop produced a manifesto, known as the Pattaya Pledges, calling on all Asian governments to fight wildlife trafficking seriously. The document argues that present trends spell the end for the tiger and is intended to spur governments into action. The manifesto calls for implementation of a South Asian wildlife enforcement network, although an Indian delegate insisted that reference to the South Asian Cooperative Environment Program (SACEP) be dropped because she considered the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) a more appropriate regional vehicle to support regional anti-wildlife trafficking efforts. The manifesto's ultimate intent is that all Asian governments, including China, should cooperate in a pan-Asian wildlife enforcement network.

¶ 16. The workshop also set the stage for a follow-on workshop for tiger range states to prepare for the 2010 Year of the Tiger summit. The World Bank and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) are driving forces behind this workshop, which is tentatively set for late October in Kathmandu. The Global Tiger Forum, which was represented in Pattaya by a retired Indian civil servant, was also present.

¶ 17. In parallel to efforts to promote GTI, the officials from the Ministry of Forests in Nepal offered to host a South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) experts meeting later this year. SACEP has made no tangible progress since SAWEN was created in Jaipur, India, in May 2008 and currently does not have a Director General in place. The Government of Nepal (GON) officials understand the value of trans-boundary anti-trafficking cooperation and are eager to move

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ahead. However, one World Bank official expressed concern that the vision of SAWEN could slip away with all the attention directed at the GTI.

Comment

¶ 18. The "Forgotten Crisis" workshop clearly advanced diplomatic efforts to deal with tigers whose present course is leading to extinction, a fate that would be tragedy for mankind. The three meetings - the Kathmandu workshop in October 2009, the Thai-sponsored Ministerial-level conference, and World Bank's Year of the Tiger Summit - will maintain the GTI momentum but will not save tigers without concrete actions on the ground. At the end of the "Forgotten Crisis" workshop, delegates were optimistic because of the Thai offer and the sense that the World Bank had leveraged the fate of tigers to the level of world leadership. According to a senior Smithsonian ecologist at the workshop, who has worked on tigers for 30 years, "it doesn't get any better than this."

¶ 19. This cable was cleared by REO Bangkok.

POWELL